

Ivory towers

Kenya's Office of the President, believe the UN may support four southern African nations in their bid to step up international ivory trade when the UN endangered species convention (Cites) meets in Nairobi next month.

"Britain has such a key presence in Kenya as a development partner that I would have expected them to better understand what opening up ivory trade would mean for us,"

elephant.

On the one hand, Kenya and its east and central African allies argue that the 1990 ban on international ivory trade — partially lifted last year to allow a "one-off" sale of stockpiled tusks from Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia to Japan — must be reinstated. On the other, the three southern African nations, together with South Africa, want Cites to approve further ivory sales this year, pledging that profits will

and Botswana to Appendix I of Cites, which forbids international trade in listed species.

"Officially, the British government has not yet decided how to vote," Rotich says, "but they openly oppose Kenya's proposal — which implies that they support the southern African position."

Rotich is armed with a welter of statistics to support his case that further breaches of the ivory ban would risk a return to the 1980s'

Ivory trading

killing fields, when poachers slaughtered 600,000 African elephants. Since the stockpile sales last April, poaching has surged in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Kenya. In Tsavo West national park, a popular Kenyan tourist spot, poaching has soared by 500%, while border prices for illegal ivory have also risen dramatically. Nationwide, 67 elephants were illegally killed last year, while 13 poachers were

TRAVELLERS' RIGHTS

When **Jake Bowers-Burbridge** trundled by horse and caravan through Sweden, he felt he was following the carefree ways of his Romany ancestors. But back in Britain, reality hit home

Long road to Utopia

Just 500 miles separates England from Sweden, but if, like me, you're a Romany traveller, the gulf in attitudes is colossal. My wife and I have recently travelled with our horse and caravan between the two countries. On our journey, we experienced not only changes in the physical landscape, but profound differences in attitudes towards many of the issues that lie at the heart of a democratic society — as well as race, access to land and respect for a traditional, ecologically sound, nomadic lifestyle.

Every nation without a homeland has its promised land. For the Kurds, it is Kurdistan; for us, it is Rumanestan. But Rumanestan is just an ideal, a utopia in time, if not in place. We may originally have come from India but I doubt that many of the world's 6 million Romanies would choose to go back there.

In 1996, I went to Sweden with my horse and wagon, in search of Rumanestan. Sweden is a large country with a small population and enough living space for thousands of travellers. The roads

are empty of traffic. Its law of *allmänna rätt* (all man's rights) is a model law protecting the "right to roam". Everybody has the right to camp and gather firewood, berries, herbs and mushrooms from the countryside. Romanies are recognised as a distinct ethnic minority by the Swedish government and even have the right to be educated in their own language.

In short, Sweden is a land where Romanies have rights. It's a long way from Britain's endless fences, criminal justice act and feudal mentality towards land and class.

When I first arrived, I felt as if I had found a little piece of Rumanestan.

There is, however, an eeriness about Sweden. The woods are suspiciously silent and empty. The thing that made us come back to England after two years was the total absence of travellers in the rural landscape. Romany communities in Sweden are concentrated in larger towns. Official policy has assimilated travellers entirely through generosity, by giving them all the benefits a well-funded welfare state can muster. It's a far cry from past policy — up until the

1960s, travellers were forcibly sterilised in Sweden — but probably a far smarter strategy.

If Sweden can be criticised for anything it is that life is too easy. It's so good it's unreal. I've even had free cooked breakfast delivered to my caravan door. The Swedes are a rich nation but many cannot comprehend how anybody would choose to live such a basic life.

Having a lifestyle like mine can give you the annoying status of an eccentric semi-celebrity. A passing tourist once photographed me peeing at 7 o'clock in the morning

